# Improving Public Transit Access for Delaware Workers

**Policy brief | 2026**

Delaware should test a coordinated approach to employment transportation: improve bus service on selected corridors while addressing the walking and accessibility barriers between stops and workplaces. A limited pilot would allow the state to evaluate benefits, costs, and implementation challenges before committing to broader expansion. On-demand transit should serve a supporting role where local evidence demonstrates a need.

The central question is whether a worker can complete a reliable, accessible journey at the times their job requires. A nearby bus route provides limited practical access if its schedule does not match a shift, a transfer is unreliable, or the final walk involves an inaccessible crossing.

Delaware Transit Corporation (DTC), which operates DART First State, reports approximately 4.99 million fixed-route bus trips for fiscal year 2026. This figure measures trips rather than individual passengers, but it establishes the scale of the existing system ([DTC, n.d.-b](https://www.dartfirststate.com/About/index.shtml?dc=fast-facts)).

Proposed service changes make this issue timely. DTC's proposal for November 15, 2026, includes eliminating on-site service to Twin Spans Business Park on Routes 15 and 51 because of low ridership, while retaining service at stops along Delaware Route 9. These changes remain proposals in the cited notice. Evaluating them requires considering the walking connections between the remaining stops and workplaces, alongside ridership and scheduling needs ([DTC, 2026](https://www.dartfirststate.com/Outreach/PublicHearings/pdfs/2026/Proposal%20Summary%20-%20English.pdf)).

Walking conditions are relevant to transportation policy because they can affect whether a transit trip is usable. An April 2026 Delaware Pedestrian Council presentation illustrated a journey from Churchman's Crossing rail station to Christiana Hospital as a 16-minute walk requiring a crossing of seven traffic lanes. That example supports examining the actual route between a station and a destination, including crossing conditions and accessibility ([Delaware Pedestrian Council, 2026b](https://deldot.gov/Programs/pedestrian_council/pdfs/2026/apr/presentation.pdf)).

The same presentation recorded five fatal pedestrian crashes during January-March 2026. These are first-quarter figures, and the presentation does not establish that the people involved were transit passengers. Their relevance is to pedestrian safety generally; they cannot establish how much a particular transit investment would reduce deaths ([Delaware Pedestrian Council, 2026b](https://deldot.gov/Programs/pedestrian_council/pdfs/2026/apr/presentation.pdf)).

**Three policy options merit consideration:**

1.Improve fixed-route frequency, operating hours, and connections. Targeted improvements could help workers whose shifts begin before current service or end after it, as well as passengers whose journeys depend on transfers. The appropriate response would vary by corridor: additional departures, adjusted schedules, or better coordination between routes. Added service requires ongoing funding for drivers, maintenance, and vehicle operation, and could require additional vehicles. Selection should therefore use both passenger data and evidence of unmet demand. Surveys of workers and employers could help determine whether low ridership reflects limited demand or service that does not fit potential riders' schedules.

2. Improve walking and wheelchair access to stops. Continuous sidewalks, accessible curb ramps, suitable crossings, lighting, and boarding areas should be evaluated as parts of a complete journey. The Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) already operates a Pedestrian Access Routes program that creates accessible pedestrian paths and upgrades existing facilities. A transit access initiative could coordinate with this program ([DelDOT, n.d.-a](https://deldot.gov/Programs/pedestrianAccessRte/index.shtml)).

Local experience also offers opportunities for testing street improvements. January 2026 council meeting notes reported that average vehicle speeds at a project near East Cochran Street and South Catherine Street in Middletown fell from approximately 26 to 17 miles per hour. The installation became permanent in December 2025. This reported before-and-after observation supports further local evaluation, although it does not establish the effect a similar intervention would have on crashes elsewhere ([Delaware Pedestrian Council, 2026a](https://deldot.gov/Programs/pedestrian_council/pdfs/2026/jan/minutes.pdf)). Permanent improvements can require construction funding, design work, coordination with property owners, and continuing maintenance.

3. Use on-demand transit selectively to address service gaps. DART Connect currently operates in Newark, Georgetown, and Millsboro. It allows booking through an app or by telephone and charges a basic fare of $2 per ride. Published service hours are Monday-Friday, 6 a.m.-8 p.m. in Newark and 5:45 a.m.-8 p.m. in Georgetown and Millsboro ([DTC, n.d.-a](https://www.dartfirststate.com/Programs/dartconnect/)). These hours matter when evaluating its suitability for weekend or late-night employment. Expansion could be considered where a flexible connection appears useful, with performance assessed through completed trips, waiting times, accessible service, and connections to buses. Its cost advantage should be tested using local operating data.

The strongest initial approach is to combine the first two options, adding on-demand service where the assessment identifies a suitable role. Bus service and access to stops address different parts of the same journey. Improving one can leave the other as a barrier.

DTC and DelDOT should select two employment corridors through a published assessment of shift schedules, passenger demand, household vehicle access, transfer connections, and pedestrian conditions. Selection should account for differences between urban and less densely populated areas. Worker input should include people with disabilities and people who currently find transit impractical.

Each corridor assessment should follow representative journeys from origin to workplace. It should record travel and waiting time, missed connections, crossing conditions, accessibility barriers, and service availability outside conventional office hours. Proposed stop relocations should receive the same assessment.

Before implementation, the agencies should publish a budget separating construction, operations, maintenance, and evaluation, with responsibilities and funding sources identified. DelDOT's Transportation Alternatives Program provides a potential competitive funding route for eligible pedestrian infrastructure, including sidewalks and crossing improvements. Funding availability and project selection would need to be confirmed ([DelDOT, n.d.-b](https://deldot.gov/Programs/tap/index.shtml)). The plan for recurring bus operations should be specified separately.

A 12-month evaluation period should begin once the pilot service and initial access improvements are operating. Measures should include door-to-door travel time, missed transfers, completed passenger trips, operating cost per trip, accessibility barriers addressed, and the number of jobs reachable at relevant shift times. Rider feedback should help explain the results.

Safety evaluation should examine crossing conditions, vehicle speeds, and longer-term crash patterns. A short pilot is unlikely to provide enough evidence to determine a change in fatalities. Where practical, comparison with a similar corridor and adjustment for seasonal travel patterns would strengthen the assessment.

The agencies should establish continuation criteria before launch and publish the results. Expansion should depend on demonstrated improvements in reliable access to employment, accessible journeys, and operating costs that the state can sustain.

## References


Delaware Department of Transportation. (n.d.-a). Pedestrian access routes program-PAR. Retrieved September 10, 2026, from [DelDOT's pedestrian access routes webpage](https://deldot.gov/Programs/pedestrianAccessRte/index.shtml)

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